

DEATH HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 14,647 deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2004, a decrease from the 15,439 deaths that occurred in 2003. The 2004 figure is the lowest resident death total recorded in Nebraska since 1992. The 2004 figure also translates into a crude mortality rate of 8.4 deaths per 1,000 residents, which is the lowest ever recorded in the state's history.

In 2004, the average age at death among Nebraskans was 75.0 years, a decrease from last year's record-high figure of 75.5 years. By gender, the average age at death in 2004 was 78.3 years for Nebraska women, which represents a slight decline from the 2003 mark of 78.7 years (which tied the state's all-time record), and 71.6 years for Nebraska men, down from the 2003 record of 71.9 years.

Nebraska's leading cause of death in 2004 was heart disease, which accounted for 3,736 resident deaths. This figure represents just over one-fourth (25.5%) of all deaths among Nebraska residents in 2004. Heart disease has been the most frequent cause of death both statewide and nationally for several decades, although its toll has declined considerably in recent years. In fact, 2004 marked the second year in which Nebraska deaths attributed to heart disease fell below 4,000.

Cancer ranked as the second leading cause of death among Nebraska residents in 2004, accounting for 3,269 deaths. This figure represents over one-fifth (22.3%) of the state's total number of deaths for 2004. Cancer of the lung was the year's leading cause of cancer deaths among both Nebraska men and women, accounting for 878 deaths (531 men, 347 women). Colorectal (colon and rectum) cancer was the state's second leading cause of cancer deaths overall in 2004, with 357 deaths (169 men, 188 women). However, breast cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska women in 2004, claiming the lives of 248 women (as well as three men). Similarly, prostate cancer was the #2 cause of cancer deaths among Nebraska men, claiming 183 lives in 2004. Taken together, these four sites accounted for slightly more than half (51.1%) of the state's cancer deaths in 2004.

Although #2 overall, cancer ranks well ahead of heart disease as the leading cause of death at younger ages. In fact, among Nebraska women between the ages of 45 and 74, cancer was by far the leading cause of death in 2004, by a count of 692 to 282 for heart disease, which was #2. Cancer was also the year's #1 cause of death among Nebraska men between the ages of 45 and 74, by a count of 840 to 591 for heart disease, the next most frequent cause of death. At age 75 and beyond, however, heart disease easily outpaced cancer, by a count of 2,766 to 1,629, as Nebraska's leading cause of death in 2004.

After heart disease and cancer, no other single cause of death accounted for more than 10% of Nebraska's deaths in 2004. Cerebrovascular disease (usually referred to as stroke) was the state's third leading cause of death in 2004, and was responsible for 977 deaths. Chronic lung disease, which had been the state's fourth leading cause of death in 2003, accounted for 703 deaths in 2004, but fell to the #5 position among the state's leading causes of death.

For the first time since 1998, accidents (also referred to as unintentional injuries) were Nebraska's fourth leading cause of death, claiming 741 lives in 2004. Motor vehicle

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accidents were once again Nebraska's leading cause of accidental deaths, accounting for 282 fatalities. Falls were the #2 cause of accidental deaths, with 172 resident fatalities in 2004. Twelve of the state's accidental deaths in 2004 were farm-related. Accidents were the leading cause of death in 2004 among Nebraska residents under the age of 45 years (excluding infants under one year of age), accounting for 254 (33.0%) of 769 deaths.

One of the most notable recent developments in Nebraska's vital statistics has been the entry of Alzheimer's Disease into the top ten causes of death, which occurred for the first time in 1995. The number of Nebraska deaths attributed to Alzheimer's Disease in 2004 (459) was just two below the 2003 count, again making it the state's sixth leading cause of death. Among women 75 and older, however, Alzheimer's Disease ranked as the state's fourth leading cause of death in 2004.

A total of 173 infant deaths occurred among Nebraska residents in 2004, which translates into an infant mortality rate of 6.6 per 1,000 live births. This figure represents an increase from the 2003 rate of 5.4, which was the lowest infant mortality rate ever recorded in the state's history. The two leading causes of infant deaths in Nebraska in 2004 were birth defects and prematurity, which resulted in 38 and 23 infant deaths, respectively. Low birth weight babies accounted for 110 (63.6%) of Nebraska's infant deaths, with 92 of these children falling into the very low birth weight (<1500 grams) category. Neonates (infants less than 28 days old) accounted for about two-thirds of Nebraska's 2004 infant deaths, with a count of 110, while post-neonates (infants between 28 days and one year of age) accounted for the remaining 63.